



United States Department of Agriculture

OCT 21 2004

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Chief State School Officer:

Overweight children and the growing risk of obesity are serious concerns for schoolchildren in the United States. The Department of Agriculture (USDA) believes that schools and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) should take a leadership role in helping students learn to make healthy lifestyle choices.

In celebration of National School Lunch Week, Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman launched "The HealthierUS School Challenge." The challenge is a USDA initiative that will recognize those concerned schools that have already taken steps to improve their school nutrition environment and will encourage other schools to follow their lead. The challenge has been issued to elementary schools and will expand to higher grades next year.

Elementary schools wishing to participate in the challenge must complete an assessment demonstrating that they meet the criteria for either Silver or Gold recognition. The first criterion is that the school must be enrolled as a Team Nutrition School. Team Nutrition is USDA's comprehensive plan for promoting the nutritional health of the Nation's schoolchildren and supports schools' efforts to improve their nutrition environment. Other challenge criteria include offering school lunches that meet USDA nutrition standards, a participation rate in the NSLP that is higher than the national average participation rate, the inclusion of nutrition education and physical activities during the school day and adherence to guidelines established by USDA for food offered or sold in schools outside the school meal programs. Once a school successfully meets the challenge it will be awarded a plaque celebrating its accomplishment. In addition, the school will be further recognized on the USDA Team Nutrition Website and may be chosen to participate in special media events.

Ultimately, USDA would like to see all schools take the challenge and *Go for the Silver!* or *Go for the Gold!* We hope that States will strongly encourage their schools to become involved in the challenge and will do all that they can to facilitate their participation. Enclosed is a brochure that describes the initiative. It will also be distributed to State Agencies responsible for Child Nutrition Programs and school district food service directors. For further information, please visit our Web site at www.fns.usda.gov/tn.

Thank you in advance for your support of this initiative and your dedication to child nutrition and health.

Sincerely,



Eric M. Bost
Under Secretary
Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services

Enclosure